

Islam And Christmas

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Quite a number of Muslims today, especially those living in Christian dominated countries or those influenced to a large degree by western culture, have been led to consider that taking part in the Christmas celebrations of friends and relatives is, at very least, a harmless pastime if not a legitimate source of pleasure for children and adults alike.

In many instances, pressure to conform with the practices of society is too great for those of weak resolve to withstand. Parents are often tempted to give in to the pleading of children who have been invited to a party or who are unable to understand why they alone are being prevented from joining the festivities they observe all around them or why they cannot receive gifts on this occasion like the other children.

Indeed, the Christmas season has been aggressively promoted in every aspect of business, in schools, in every public place. High pressure sales tactics have invaded the home through television, radio, magazine and newspaper, captivating the imagination with every kind of attraction day and night for a month or more every year. Little wonder that many of those thus targeted so persistently succumb to temptation.

Among earlier generations, Christmas was an occasion which was still basically religious in orientation. Gifts, trees, decorations and feasting assumed lesser roles. But now all of this has changed. As noted in an American publication, Christmas has gone the way of many other aspects of society, becoming one more element in the mass culture which every season enables manufacturers and merchants to make millions of dollars through an elaborate system of gift exchange which comes more often from mutual expectations that "must" be fulfilled than from the heart.

The commonly accepted notion that happiness is derived largely from possessions and entertainment is the driving force behind the month-long preparations and festivities which continue on through the end of the year. This fact, although blameworthy in itself, has led many Muslims into the delusion that Christmas is no longer a religious occasion and therefore does not conflict with Islamic belief. The materialistic atmosphere surrounding the celebration of Christmas is, in reality, a manifestation of pagan culture (Jaahiliyyah) at its worst. It can only be seen by the conscious Muslim believer as a rat-race designed and implemented by Shaytaan to accomplish a great waste of time, effort, money and resources while countless families barely subsist in a state of poverty throughout many areas of the world.

In addition to the commercial side of Christmas, although less obvious to the casual observer, are certain religious aspects to be noted. The celebration was and still is intended by practicing Christians as a remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) who is considered by many of them as God incarnate or the second person in a trinity, and thus they celebrate the birth of "divinity." The word itself is an abbreviated form of "Christ Mass," i.e., sacrament in commemoration of Christ. Although taken by Christians to be the birthday of Jesus, the actual date of celebration, December 25th, cannot be traced back any further than the fourth century after Christ. Ironically, this day is also considered to be the birthday of the Hindu god, Krishna, as well as Mithra, the Greek god of light. It also coincides with the annual Tree Festival which had long been

celebrated in Northern Europe before the Christian era and which has been recently revived in some Arab countries in an attempt to encourage celebration by disguising the religious significance of the day.

The Christmas tree is the most obvious aspect of that pagan celebration which was incorporated along with its date of observance, December 25th, into church rites. The evergreen tree, because it keeps its green needles throughout the winter months, was believed by pre-Christian pagans to have special powers of protection against the forces of nature and evil spirits. The end of December marked the onset of a visible lengthening of daylight hours - the return of warmth and light and defeat of those evil forces of cold and darkness. At a particular stage of its development, the church is known to have adopted certain of the popular pagan practices into Christianity for political or social reasons.

Thus, in more aspects than one, the holiday is deeply rooted in the worship of different forms of creation rather than the Creator Himself. A Muslim cannot possibly approve of such beliefs or the practices which stem from them. Anyone with a minimal knowledge of Islam would surely reject kufr (disbelief) and shirk (association of partners with Allaah) in every form. Only through ignorance or unawareness could one continue to participate in activities that reflect the acceptance of both. Muslims must be firm in refusal of all which is contrary to the concept of "Laa ilaaha illallaaha (there is none deserving of subservience except Allaah alone)." Consideration for others is well and good on the condition that Islamic principles are not compromised. Allah (subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa) says:

"If you obey most of those upon the earth, they will lead you away from the way of Allaah." [An'aam 6:116]

And He commands:

"Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and do not follow any patrons other than Him." [A'raaf 7:3]

Although some, in all honesty, admit their weakness in the face of continual social pressure, others defend their participation by the strange assertion that they observe the occasion through regard for Jesus ('Isa), a prophet of Islam. If such an observance, with its semblance of Islamic atmosphere, is invalid for Prophet Muhammad, (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) how then can it reasonably be valid for other prophets who neither observed nor encouraged such practices, which were later devised by those who abandoned prophetic teachings for their own inclinations and preferences?

"Have you seen him who take as his god his own desire, and Allah has left him astray through knowledge." [Jaathiyah 45:23]

Again, the Muslim is reminded of the hadiths in which the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) warned against imitating the non-believers and encouraged distinguishing oneself from them in dress and manner. Whether taken from the materialistic or the religious standpoint, Christmas can have no place in the Muslim's heart nor in his home.

Any Muslim, young or old, who has a secure place in an Islamic community or group which has regular activities and affords companionship will find little difficulty in rejecting that which is harmful to himself and his family, in spite of the apparent attractions. In some societies, refusal and resistance may require actual jihad, but those who seek the acceptance of Allah and fear Him will

undertake the task with knowledge that they are striving for salvation and will thus be firm and resolute. For Allah (subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa) calls to believers, saying:

“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones.” [Tahreem 66:6]

And in the avoidance of Hellfire lies Paradise.